
There are observers, particularly among American Indians themselves, who deny that the term ‘postcolonial’ can be applied to them, given that they are still colonised. There are others, however, for whom postcolonial analysis is eminently applicable to the Native American situation, including such central figures as Louis Owens (Choctaw-Irish), and clearly Punyashree Panda agrees. Her book accordingly applies postcolonial discourse analysis to four significant Native writers, persuasively situating their writing within interpretative practices widely associated with the work of postcolonial writers from other parts of the world.

Panda’s examination of her chosen writers is well supported by reference to critical currents within Native American studies as well as postcolonial studies, both areas represented by a selection of theorists and critics from each field. The confluence of interests in the two disciplines in critiquing the injuries of colonial oppression, which in the case of Indigenous nations are ongoing, is laid out in lucid fashion, with recourse to familiar observers as well as less familiar ones. With respect to the familiarity of the writers, three of the four texts chosen for analysis – each writer is represented by just one book – might be thought to be somewhat overfamiliar in this context. Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, in particular, have received extensive critical treatment, while Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* is not much less well-known. Only Métis Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* does not belong to the acknowledged canon of North American Indigenous writing, although it is well-known in Canada. From one angle, of course, dealing with such widely-taught texts makes the book’s syntheses of the debates surrounding them of relevance to courses where they are included.

Despite these useful characteristics, however, the book contains serious flaws at the level of writing and editing. To take the latter first, there are numerous typographical mistakes, punctuation errors and formatting inconsistencies, including within quotations, beginning on the table of contents where one text is in italics while the other three are not. Neither the author nor the publisher appear to know that the frequently-mentioned Frantz Fanon’s name has a ‘t’. More seriously, the constant use of words or grammatical constructions that are wrong is not acceptable in scholarly work. There is a certain irony in making this observation, given that the book refers to how ‘[u]sing the very language of the colonizer, postcolonial writers break the rules set forth by colonials in the act of their writing’ (11). In the very next line Panda proves her point by saying: ‘Postcolonial writing makes a conscious effort to demur the stereotypes and reestablish their identities’ (11). A charitable reader might find the use of ‘to demur’ here creative and bold, and perhaps I would too were it not for all the other non-standard uses that cannot, even charitably, be considered a postcolonial wrestling of control of the language from hegemonic forces. When there are so many of them, they become an irritant, a barrier to the circulation of Panda’s thinking about the interesting material she is dealing with. Moreover, they frequently do her thinking a disservice by striking a jarring note: what does it mean to say that Donna Benet ‘gives a wholesome idea of what postcolonial is all about’ (9)? How ready are readers of English to accept structures such as: ‘Erdrich achieves to present the novel “the Indian way”’ (189) or neologisms such as ‘[t]he funkiesm of the community’ (156)?
In addition, the book contains too many distractingly naïve arguments, of the sort: ‘Erdrich being a woman herself, the women characters in her novels are almost always vivacious and interesting’ (64), or: ‘GGRW, having been written by King, a mixed-blood Cherokee, hence speaks from the Native point of view’ (116). The former needs no commentary, while the pitfalls in the latter are many, from the assumption that anyone from a particular group produces an authentic discourse simply by virtue of group affiliation to the corollary that anyone who is not from the group cannot appreciate or understand its point of view. By implication, Panda cannot believe this, or she would not have invested so much in a book that, as is usual in this area, is not just an analysis of Indigenous American perspectives but an intervention supporting greater attention to and respect for Native ways of perceiving realities and of constructing them in written narrative.

The espousal of Native epistemologies and values makes for an uneasy dichotomy to some extent given that Panda is also insistent that it is ‘advisable that one looks at these texts from a postcolonial, poststructural, postmodern perspective’ (205). I think she is right, for American Indian writers are certainly not only cognisant of but sensitive to the cultural implications of such perspectives, and whether they use them, make fun of them or attempt to reject them their work has come under pressure from these discourse areas. The writers she deals with are not only aware of these perspectives but have contributed to furthering and enriching the uses to which they may be put, and to them could be added many others, from Gerald Vizenor to Diane Glancy, Gordon Henry Jr or Richard Van Camp. Indeed, it is surprising that Panda only once refers to Vizenor, and even uses an anonymous website source as her principal source for the subject of history’s being written by the victor. Whether Panda’s work is considered bold and quirky, or awkward and uneven, is up to each reader, but my feeling is that this book should have been edited with much greater care so that its synthesis of the issues could emerge with more authority.

David Callahan